DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 451 010 RC 022 876

TITLE	Pennsylvania's Rural Homeless Reality.
INSTITUTION	Center for Rural Pennsylvania, Harrisburg.
PUB DATE	2000-11-00
NOTE	5p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Center for Rural Pennsylvania, 200 North Third St., Suite 600, Harrisburg, PA 17101; Tel: 717-787-9555.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Children; *Economically Disadvantaged; *Homeless People; Housing Needs; Poverty; Rural Areas; *Rural Population; Rural Urban Differences; *State Programs; *Welfare Services
IDENTIFIERS	*Access to Services; *Pennsylvania; Working Poor

ABSTRACT

The Center for Rural Pennsylvania analyzed data from the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare concerning rural homelessness for fiscal years 1997 through 1999. Findings indicate that rural Pennsylvania has a homeless population and it is growing. In 1999, more than 21,700 clients received homeless assistance in rural areas, 44 percent of whom were children. Between 1997 and 1999, the number of clients receiving homeless assistance in rural areas increased 20 percent. Much rural homelessness may be unreported because this analysis only included those who requested assistance, and because many of the rural homeless do not fit current definitions of homelessness developed for urban areas. The analysis also revealed that rural areas provide fewer services than most urban areas, most rural assistance is limited to case management services and assisted rental housing, few rural communities have emergency shelters, and most rural homelessness is among the working poor. Lack of affordable housing is an issue in many rural communities. There is a misconception that homelessness is an urban problem, or that when it occurs in rural areas, it affects only transients. For those rural residents facing homelessness because of domestic violence or substance abuse, the social stigma can be overwhelming. Education is an important first step in building an effective service delivery system. Funding is also an issue, as almost three times as many people are turned away in rural areas than in urban areas because of lack of funding. County data on homeless assistance, 1998-99, are included. (TD)

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THE CENTER FOR
Rural Pennsylvania
A Legislative Agency of the Pennsylvania General Assembly

November 2000

Pennsylvania's Rural Homeless Reality

Summary

Homelessness is often viewed as an urban issue since it is easier to visualize a person needing assistance or seeking shelter in urban areas. But homelessness is also a rural issue.

To develop an understanding of homelessness as it affects rural residents, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania analyzed data from the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare for fiscal years 1997 through 1999.

While the data did not include reliable estimates on the number of rural homeless, it did include information on the number of people who received homeless assistance. From this information, it was possible to develop a clearer profile of who received homeless assistance, where many of those who received assistance were located, the types of assistance received, and the associated costs.

In general, the analysis revealed that homelessness is an issue throughout rural Pennsylvania. It also showed that rural areas provide fewer services than most urban areas; most rural assistance is limited to case management services and assisted rental housing; few rural communities have emergency shelters; and most rural homelessness is an issue among the working poor.

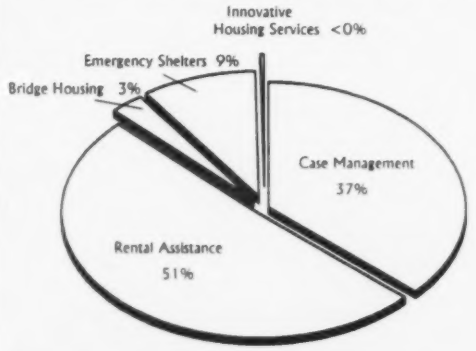
Method

To analyze the issue of rural homelessness, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania used data from the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare's Homeless Assistance Program (HAP). This data detailed the number of clients by the types of services they received for fiscal years 1997, 1998, and 1999. It also provided some general information on the economic and household characteristics of the clients.

Within HAP, there were six basic homeless assistance programs:

- Emergency Shelter: provides mass shelter, mass shelter supplies, such as cots and blankets, and individual shelter in hotels and motels through a voucher system.
- Bridge Housing: provides housing and case management service to homeless individuals and families for up to one year with the goal of returning clients to the most independent and self-sufficient life situation possible.
- Rental Assistance: provides assistance in the form of payments for rent, utilities, mortgage for home and trailer owners, rent for trailers and trailer lots, and security deposits to prevent homelessness when eviction is imminent. This component also looks to expedite the movement of people from shelters to available housing. Clients also receive case management and counseling on budgeting and management of household finances.
- Case Management: provides assistance to homeless and near homeless individuals and families to work towards permanent housing and self-sufficiency.
- Innovative Supportive Housing Service: provides counties with the flexibility to design a supportive housing service for homeless and near homeless persons that is outside the scope of existing HAP components. This component allows counties to address unique needs.
- PennFree Bridge Housing: Available only in Allegheny and Philadelphia counties, this program provides housing and case management services to homeless clients with substance abuse problems. Contact with substance abuse support services is emphasized in the program.

Types of Homeless Assistance Services Provided To Rural Clients, FY 1998-1999



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Each of these programs is based on need, which means that clients must be in or near poverty. In 1999, the poverty rate for a family of three was $13,888. County governments oversee the provision of assistance to the clients through county personnel or a contracted organization. Ninety-three percent of the funds for these programs come from HAP, with the remaining funding coming from county and client contributions.

Information on the number of clients who received assistance and total expenditures for each of these programs was analyzed from a rural/urban perspective. The analysis included any person who received assistance in a rural county. A county was identified as rural if 50 percent or more of its population was defined as rural by the U.S. Census Bureau. Counties that were less than 50 percent rural were considered urban.

It is important to note that there may be more rural homeless than reported here. This analysis only included those who requested assistance. Also, since assistance programs do not have residency requirements, there is no way to know if those who received assistance were residents of the county in which they received assistance.

To make the analysis easier to read, the Center used the last date of the fiscal year to represent the entire calendar year. For example, the 1998-99 fiscal year is shown throughout the analysis as 1999.

Findings

- In 1999, more than 21,700 clients received homeless assistance in rural areas. The client to population ratio in rural areas was 8.5 clients for every 1,000 residents. In urban areas, more than 94,000 clients received assistance, with a client to population ratio of 10 clients for every 1,000 residents.
- Statewide, nearly 116,000 clients received homeless assistance in 1999, or 9.6 clients for every 1,000 residents.
- Between 1997 and 1999, the number of clients receiving homeless assistance in rural areas increased 20 percent. In urban areas, the increase was 28 percent.
- Regionally, in 1999, south central Pennsylvania had the highest client to population ratio in the state with 15 clients for every 1,000 residents. The northeast region has the state's lowest ratio of 6.6 clients for every 1,000 residents.
- At the county level, in 1999, every county provided some type of homeless assistance. Philadelphia, Allegheny, and Cumberland counties had the greatest number of clients, while Montour, Cameron, and Forest counties had the least number.
- Examining the client to population ratio by county in 1999, the analysis revealed that Lycoming, Cumberland, Fayette, Armstrong, and Blair counties each had more than 20 clients per 1,000 residents, which was double the statewide ratio. The counties with the lowest ratios were Adams, Chester, and Montgomery. Each of these counties had less than 1.5 clients per 1,000 residents.
- In 1999, rural areas had almost 20,000 emergency shelter units, or one unit for every 130 residents. Urban areas had more than 544,000 emergency shelter units, or one unit for every 17 people. The counties with the most units per capita were Philadelphia, Dauphin, and Allegheny. Twenty-two counties, most of which were predominately rural, had no emergency shelters.

Homeless Assistance Programs

- In 1999, the most common type of assistance provided in rural areas was rental assistance at 51 percent, followed by case management at 37 percent. Less than 10 percent of the 21,700 rural clients used emergency shelters in rural areas.
- In urban areas, slightly more than 33 percent of clients received rental assistance and 30 percent received case management assistance. Combined, over 31 percent of the clients in urban areas used the PennFree and emergency shelter program. In both rural and urban areas, roughly the same percentage of clients received bridge housing assistance and innovative housing services.
- In rural areas, the largest programmatic increase was in case management assistance. Between fiscal years1997 and 1999, the number of rural clients who received this type of assistance increased 100 percent.
- Another program component that had a large increase between fiscal years 1997 and 1999 was rental assistance, where the number of rural clients increased 43 percent.
- The number of clients receiving emergency shelter assistance in rural areas declined nearly 65 percent. In urban areas, there was only a 16 percent drop in the number of clients in this program.

Who Received Services

- Among the more than 21,700 rural clients who received homeless assistance in 1999, 44 percent were children who were part of families that became homeless.
- Of the nearly 5,000 rural families that received homeless assistance, 46 percent were also receiving welfare payments, or TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families). The most common type of assistance provided to these families was rental assistance. In urban areas, only 32 percent of the families that received homeless assistance also received TANF payments.
- Seven percent of the rural families that received homeless assistance had lost TANF benefits within the last 12 months.
- More than 33 percent of the rural adult clients were employed when they first received homeless assistance. In urban areas, excluding those enrolled in PennFree, 27 percent of the adult [illegible]e employed.
- In rural areas, more than 3,200 persons did not

receive service because of a lack of funding, or one person in every 790 residents. In urban areas, more than 4,200 persons were turned away because of a lack of funding, or one person in every 2,200 residents. Thirty-six of Pennsylvania's 67 counties turned away clients because of a lack of funding. Regionally, the highest number of persons who did not receive service because of funding was in the northwest.

Cost of Services

- In 1999, more than $23.2 million was spent statewide on assistance to the homeless, or roughly $200 per client. In rural areas, $3.3 million was spent, or $153 per client. The urban average was $212 per client, or a total $19.9 million.
- Regionally, central Pennsylvania had the lowest expenditures at $108 per client, while the southeast had the highest at $280 per client. At the county level, Tioga, Adams, and Montgomery had the highest expenditures, each spending more than $750 per client. Counties with the lowest expenditures were Elk, Cumberland, and Lycoming, each spending less than $75 per client.
- Within rural areas, more than half of the expenditures was used for the assisted housing program. Again, this program provides funds to clients when eviction is imminent and to help clients move out of shelters and into available housing. The average rural client in this program received less than $145. In urban areas, the average was $185 per client.
- Between 1998 and 1999, total funding for homeless assistance in rural areas declined more than $400,000, or 11 percent. The main cause of the decline was an 8 percent decrease in funding to HAP. Urban areas saw a nearly 15 percent decrease in HAP funding during this period.

Issues

Homelessness is a statewide problem that is not unique to any particular area of rural or urban Pennsylvania. According to the results of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania's analysis, rural Pennsylvania has a homeless population and the population is growing. Assistance was provided to clients located in all regions of the state. People who requested assistance were located in fast growing areas as well as regions that have seen economic stagnation.

Because of conventional definitions, however, rural homelessness may go under-reported. According to a 1996 U.S. Department of Agriculture report on rural homelessness[1], conventional definitions of homelessness, developed for urban

Clients Receiving Homeless Assistance (by county 1998-1999)

	# Clients Receiving Homeless Program Assistance 1998-99	# Clients Per 1,000 Residents	State Homeless Assistance Program (HAP) Allocation, 1998-99	Allocation Per Client
Pennsylvania	115,718	9.6	$21,658,235	$187
Adams	132	1.5	$108,675	$823
Allegheny	11,379	9.1	$2,777,320	$244
Armstrong	1,965	26.9	$234,566	$119
Beaver	593	3.2	$113,613	$192
Bedford	239	4.8	$25,064	$105
Berks	1,761	4.9	$532,744	$303
Blair	2,667	20.5	$306,891	$115
Bradford	474	7.6	$45,104	$95
Bucks	1,970	3.3	$460,163	$234
Butler	563	3.3	$145,597	$259
Cambria	1,257	8.2	$191,205	$152
Cameron	52	9.3	$7,086	$136
Carbon	346	5.9	$25,298	$73
Centre	968	7.3	$423,989	$438
Chester	589	1.4	$312,339	$530
Clarion	593	14.2	$125,796	$212
Clearfield	272	3.4	$56,885	$209
Clinton	79	2.1	$22,605	$286
Columbia	147	2.3	$26,758	$182
Crawford	1,699	19.1	$239,252	$141
Cumberland	6,998	33.2	$361,471	$52
Dauphin	4,013	16.3	$857,108	$214
Delaware	3,500	6.5	$1,001,299	$286
Elk	409	11.9	$29,479	$72
Erie	3,951	14.3	$721,048	$182
Fayette	3,882	27.0	$536,198	$138
Forest	29	5.9	$4,526	$156
Franklin	1,653	12.8	$126,730	$77
Fulton	197	13.5	$15,464	$78
Greene	448	10.6	$57,926	$129
Huntingdon	118	2.6	$22,663	$192
Indiana	1,067	12.1	$263,607	$247
Jefferson	81	1.8	$27,898	$344
Juniata	74	3.3	$20,640	$279
Lackawanna	838	4.1	$272,171	$325
Lancaster	4,432	9.6	$411,867	$93
Lawrence	1,277	13.5	$133,720	$105
Lebanon	1,220	10.4	$170,336	$140
Lehigh	2,613	8.7	$494,472	$189
Luzerne	5,074	16.3	$899,160	$177
Lycoming	5,968	51.1	$173,562	$29
McKean	350	7.6	$36,511	$104
Mercer	677	5.6	$121,304	$179
Mifflin	197	4.2	$25,352	$129
Monroe	217	1.7	$50,344	$232
Montgomery	763	1.1	$549,221	$720
Montour	59	3.4	$11,013	$187
Northampton	752	2.9	$374,119	$497
Northumberland	168	1.8	$45,414	$270
Perry	387	8.7	$53,602	$139
Philadelphia	20,528	14.5	$5,089,168	$248
Pike	100	2.4	$15,030	$150
Potter	252	14.7	$29,327	$116
Schuylkill	318	2.1	$135,583	$426
Snyder	308	8.1	$39,840	$129
Somerset	587	7.3	$44,748	$76
Sullivan	107	17.7	$11,992	$112
Susquehanna	360	8.5	$32,552	$90
Tioga	91	2.2	$122,175	$1,343
Union	287	7.1	$42,325	$147
Venango	298	5.2	$45,132	$151
Warren	502	11.5	$66,224	$132
Washington	1,551	7.6	$248,729	$160
Wayne	226	4.9	$28,947	$128
Westmoreland	4,973	13.4	$567,835	$114
Wyoming	217	7.4	$18,855	$87
York	5,856	15.6	$1,070,598	$183

Homeless Assistance Program: Annual Client and Fiscal Report, 1998-99, PA Dept of Public Welfare, Office of Social Programs

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areas, do not fit well with rural realities. For example, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires people to be "literally homeless" — sleeping in a shelter or on the street — to qualify for targeted assistance. In rural areas, however, because of the lack of shelters, the rural homeless are more likely to live in a vehicle, or with relatives in overcrowded or substandard housing. As a result, many of the rural homeless may not be identified as homeless by the current definition.

Homelessness also appears to be a symptom of other social problems. According to the National Coalition for the Homeless[2], the causes of rural homelessness nationwide are poverty, housing costs, distance from low-income housing and employment opportunities, lack of transportation, restrictive housing codes and landuse regulations, and changing real estate markets. Causes also include persons fleeing abusive relationships, migrant/seasonal workers who exhaust their resources and have nowhere to go, and prolonged substance abuse.

To varying degrees, every rural community in Pennsylvania is plagued with some or all of these social problems. For example, over the last 30 years, rural areas have had higher than average poverty and unemployment rates, fewer low-income housing units, and a limited public transportation network. In addition, many growing rural communities are struggling to provide affordable, safe housing and job opportunities for current and incoming residents.

In some cases, new housing is targeted to upper-income families and low-to-moderate income families are finding affordable housing to be an overwhelming issue. In other rural regions of the state, the lack of economic growth has meant less jobs, especially for less skilled workers. As a result, these workers are forced to take low-paying jobs, which means that housing in these communities becomes an even more formidable issue.

In three counties in the rural northeast, for example, there was a 30 percent increase in population between 1990 and 1999. In 1998, the average cost of a new home was nearly five times the average salary. This region also had only 3.9 assisted rental units for every 1,000 residents, and between 1997 and 1999, the number of people receiving homeless assistance increased 9 percent. In the rural southwest, however, the population did not increase between 1990 and 1999, and the unemployment rate was 2 percentage points above the statewide average. This region had 17.8 assisted rental units for every 1,000 residents and the cost of a new home was three times the average salary. Between 1997 and 1999, the region experienced a 56 percent increase in the number of people receiving homeless assistance.

For the foreseeable future, housing availability and affordability will continue to be issues in many rural communities and will continue to affect the number and nature of homeless people in rural Pennsylvania. To address these issues, traditionally divergent groups will need to increase outreach, education, and coordination of services.

Critical to dealing with homelessness is the very acceptance of its existence. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, there is an attitude among rural citizens that homelessness is an urban problem, or that when homelessness exists in rural areas, it affects only transients. For those rural residents facing homelessness as the result of domestic violence or substance abuse, the social stigma attached to these situations or conditions can be overwhelming. Education is an important first step in laying the foundation for an effective service delivery system.

For those agencies that form a community safety net, a review may be needed to determine how the current social service delivery system is meeting actual need. While most rural service providers recognize that there is a homeless population needing services, few operate emergency shelters. On a per capita basis, almost three times as many people are turned away in rural areas than in urban areas because of a lack of funding.

The limited resources for social service agencies are nothing new in rural Pennsylvania. And additional funding, regardless of the source, will not, in and of itself, provide an instant solution.

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[1] U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Rural Economic and Community Development. Rural Homelessness: Focusing on the Needs of Rural Homeless, 1996.

[2] National Coalition for the Homeless, NCH Fact Sheet #13: Rural Homelessness, March 1999, www.nch.ari.net/rural.html